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ABSTRACT

Excerpted from the final report for a pilot study on conflict management, this paper gives a theoretical overview of the role of conflict in educational and municipal governance and offers two in-depth analyses that illustrate the theories presented. The authors' comparative study of the behavior of superintendents and city managers suggested that city managers are more effective handlers of conflict. Possible explanations for the city managers' greater effectiveness include the superintendents' high level of professionalism and consequent unwillingness to bargain, environmental conditions, service delivery characteristics of the community, and the role of interest groups. Stephen Bailey's typology of conflict as subordinate, superordinate, or lateral forms the framework for the theoretical discussion. (WD)

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Conflict Management in Educational and Municipal Governance

by

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Contents

Theoretical Overview 1

Introduction 1

A Definition of Conflict 3

Conflict Management Behavior 8

Superintendents and City Managers 13

In-Depth Analyses 22

Introduction 22

In-Depth Analysis of a Superintendent 22

In-Depth Analysis of a City Manager 32

Interpretation of the In-Depth Analyses 43

List of References 47

Theoretical Overview

Introduction

The forces of reform active in the early part of this century shaped and altered both the educational and municipal structures of governance; thus, school and municipal decision makers today have many issues, problems, and constraints in common. Just as the council-manager form of government is often identified as one of the goals of municipal reform, so the modern school superintendency is a product of education reform (Banfield and Wilson; Boynton; Dye).

While the reform movement attempted to make the tasks of managing the schools and cities less political, the increasing number of competing demands placed on city managers and superintendents may make the use of "political" skills more necessary for successful conflict management. Although these administrators may not have a formal role in collective bargaining, they are involved in the process. In addition, state and federal legislatures, courts, and agencies have begun to assume a more active role in the policy making that affects educational and municipal governance. Local educational and municipal administrators may then be faced with a more complex task of managing conflicting demands.

We have undertaken a comparative study of the conflict management behavior of superintendents and city managers in order to see how the two groups might learn from each other. Over the past twenty-five years or so, superintendents have been relatively insulated from conflict in

comparison with city managers, who play a more active political role in dealing with competing interest groups. Consequently, we hypothesize that superintendents may be able to learn from city managers how to be more effective managers of conflict. In our pilot study, city managers have also expressed an interest in learning from the comparison. The fact that approximately two-thirds of both city managers and superintendents in the same localities meet informally, and thirty percent routinely, to discuss mutual concerns suggests that many city managers and superintendents feel they share common responsibilities and would benefit from comparative analysis.

Some research has been done on the role of conflict management behavior of city managers in municipal governance (Eyestone; Loveridge; Stillman). But conflict as an area of inquiry is still novel to educational research. Salisbury, in his recent study of citizen participation in education, notes his surprise at the recurrence of conflict as a topic throughout the course of his interviews. Salisbury's conclusions are highly revealing:

> School activists dislike conflict. They are uneasy about political parties because, in part at least, partisan involvement implies directly competitive struggle. They are uneasy about changes within their communities or in their school program, in part it seems, because change represents the possibility of disagreement. They are, with some exceptions, uneasy in the presence of heterogeneity, of race or class, because this too means potential conflict over what values ought to prevail. . . . Our data are not remotely sufficient to explore thoroughly this issue, but the matter of American attitudes toward political and social conflict is thoroughly deserving of a prominent place in the research agenda (Salisbury, 1980, pp. 198-99).

This comparative analysis responds to Salisbury's concern; we give conflict "a prominent place in the research agenda."

A Definition of Conflict

Conflict has been the source of conceptual confusion for decades (Fink). Introductory texts in political science simply define conflict as "situations in which one individual wishes to follow a line of action that would make it difficult or impossible for someone else to pursue his own desires" (Dahl). Such texts also assume the necessity, indeed the desirability, of conflict: "Conflict is not an unfortuante and temporary aberration from the norm..." (Ranney). More sophisticated conceptual schemes, such as those proposed by Schmidt and Kochan, include not only goal incompatibility but also a variety of other preconditions. That is, they agree that incompatibility of goals is a necessary, but not a sufficient, definition of conflict.

We start, then, with a generally accepted definition: Conflict is a situation in which two or more parties perceive that their goals are incompatible. Obviously, conflict is common in schools or in any organization (Nebgen). However, perceived incompatibility of goals may not lead to behavior normally regarded as conflictual. One school of thought, derived initially from the early work of Ross and Simmel, argues that incompatible goals may lead to either competition or conflict. The difference between these is analogous to the difference between a race and a fight. In a race, nothing is done to obstruct one's opponents' efforts, whereas, in a fight, obstruction is the goal.

Thus, our definition expands to include: (a) mutually perceived, incompatible goals and (b) perceived opportunity for interference (Seiler). Stated in terms of traditional political science, conflict consists of situations in which persons with mutually incompatible goals simultaneously perceive an opportunity to achieve their goals by blocking those of their adversaries. This additional, active component, the blocking behavior of opponents, constitutes a refinement of our earlier distinctions between active and passive conflict and is helpful in sharpening our understanding of management behavior.

Having provided a definition capable of being utilized in our research, our next task is to specify the dimensions of conflict. Stephen K. Bailey's typology of conflict provides a beginning. He identifies three types of conflict situations: subordinate conflict (between an administrator and subordinates), superordinate conflict (between an administrator and superiors), and lateral conflict (between an administrator and equals).

Subordinate conflict concerns disputes within an organization that are usually resolved through established lines of authority. Subordinate or intraorganizational disagreements may occur frequently, but with minor impact, if they are contained. In the context of episodic and routine conflict, intraorganizational disputes are more easily routinized. For instance, if a teacher were found to be incompetent, the principal and the district personnel director would initiate the dismissal process. As long as the teacher followed the district's guidelines for grievance arbitration and due process, the conflict would remain subordinate (and contained) and its resolution subject to instituted policies. However,

were the teacher to enlist the support of members of the community or special interest groups and attempt to bring political pressure to bear, the conflict would become lateral since interest groups are the political equals of superintendents and other professionals. Thus, unresolved subordinate disputes may result in a broadening of conflict to either the superordinate or lateral levels.

Superordinate conflict in educational governance generally refers to differences between a superintendent (as representative of the district) and state or federal agencies. Conflict over federally mandated desegregation plans or programs for the handicapped would fall into this category. In these cases, the state and federal courts have jurisdiction and school administrators are legally responsible for implementing the courts' decisions.

Lateral conflict, as suggested above, could involve the superintendent and community groups and/or members of the school board. Legally, the school board is in a superordinate position, but in effect it often shares decision-making authority with the superintendent. Although occurring less frequently than subordinate conflict, lateral conflict is more likely to result in a major impact on policy and organization. The dispute described in our in-depth analysis of a superintendent is just such a conflict. The superintendent in this case found himself in opposition to an organization of black parents and community leaders who were in turn allied with certain members of the school board. The conflict brought about a new desegregation plan and a change of superintendents.

Conflict may develop because the parties disagree on the delegation of authority (i.e., they disagree about whether the conflict is subordinate, superordinate, or lateral). Loveridge, for example, finds fundamental conflict between city council members and managers in their perceptions of the manager's role in policy making. Our research on boards and superintendents similarly suggests that, in some situations, the conflict involves less the substance of a dispute than the clarification of each disputant's role of authority.

Bailey's typology, in addition to offering the idea that conflicts may be about appropriate roles, offers the advantage of clarifying research domains. Subordinate conflict is normally the domain of public administration, industrial relations, and related disciplines. Most literature on management, whether public or private, is concerned with managing disturbances within the organization, where a hierarchy of authority is already established. Clearly, management is concerned about subordinate conflicts because the collective goals of the organization are disrupted if subordinate conflict is poorly handled. Hence, management literature quite naturally treats conflict as a destructive force. Such terms as "a breakdown in standard mechanism of decision making" (March and Simon) and "a threat to cooperation" (Marek) are illustrative of this underlying assumption.

We are not primarily concerned with subordinate disputes, but our interest in them is substantive because they consume a large portion of an administrator's time and often expand to include a larger public. It is normal for political scientists to be more concerned with conflict

that engages the attention of broader publics than with intraorganizational disputes, although the lines are frequently blurred. As Dye and Hawkins explain, "Metropolitan government is too often treated as a problem in administration rather than a problem in the resolution of conflict." According to these authors, and to others such as Banfield and Wilson, "The management of conflict in society is one of the basic purposes of government." Our perspective, then, is in this tradition. We are most concerned with conflicts that have expanded into the arena of public policy. This does not, however, preclude awareness of the consequences of intraorganizational conflict. In this view, conflict management would not be soley a matter of maintaining the structure of authority relationships within an organization, but also of regulating the development of conflict in the public arena.

We believe additionally that organizational theory has been too simplistic in its assumptions about conflict termination. Our pilot study persuades us of the merits of a less mechanistic view. Such a view is supported by the work of Lewis Coser. Coser argues that, in social conflict, provisions for termination must be made by the contenders. He asserts that conflict is not terminated unless all parties recognize that the conflict has ended. For Coser, conflict termination occurs in the eyes of the contending parties. Unanimous agreement is necessary for a conflict to be deemed terminated. Kriesberg endorses Coser's definition of conflict termination, but raises the problem of some, but not all, parties agreeing that the conflict has ended. In accordance with Coser and Kriesberg, we amend our definition of conflict termination by excising

the notion that contending parties will be satisfied. Rather, the contending parties should merely agree that the issue has been resolved. Failing unanimous agreement, we may have to designate arbitrary, but explicit, demarcations of conflict termination. Such definitions will be developed in terms of the behavior of authoritative school district and city officials. Possible definitions include voting and non-voting decisions by legislative bodies, decisions by administrative personnel, or such "non-decisions" as failure or refusal to place an issue on the agenda of a formal meeting, or the cessation of demands by contending parties.

Conflict Management Behavior

Mintzberg argues that the question, "What do managers do?", has never been answered. His attempt to do so, and especially his isolation of the role of manager as "disturbance handler," is helpful. However, he maintains, without evidential support, that the management of public or private enterprise is essentially the same. We argue that there are substantial differences. Private managers do not have representative functions and are not responsible for making authoritative value decisions or for the management of social conflict.

The literature of political science, as typified by Banfield and Wilson, asserts that conflict is best managed (converted from active to passive) when it is regulated. As Dye and Hawkins put it, "Government regulates conflict by establishing and enforcing general rules by which conflict is to be carried on, by arranging compromises and balancing interests, and by imposing settlements which the parties to the disputes

must accept." In school governance, municipal governance, and, indeed, all governance, this task is not necessarily easy. It is less difficult in systems with institutionalized channels of communication among elites (e.g., political parties and established interest groups) and between elites and masses. In the absence of institutionalized and legitimate conflict articulation, management becomes more complex. Indeed, some, such as Barnard, believe that the natural, most instinctive, response is not to regulate, but to avoid conflict, to reduce contact between conflicting parties (Nebgen), to prevent potential controversies from achieving formal agenda status (Cobb and Elder), or to play for time.

It seems clear that avoidance of social conflict can result in conflict expansion, first to articulate publics, and then perhaps to normally passive masses (Cobb and Elder, p. 81). The literature of fluoridation and school desegregation strongly supports the notion that avoidance leads to increased lay participation.

School managers are apparently more attuned to subordinate than to lateral or superodinate conflict management. We raise here the possibility that managers adept at handling intraorganizational disturbances may be inept at resolving lateral conflicts. Management techniques may vary with the type of conflict (Nebgen); thus, a reasonable hypothesis is that training managers in subordinate conflicts may inhibit their ability to handle lateral conflicts. Such an idea was suggested by Crain in discussing the response of superintendents to demands for school desegregation: "Interaction between civil rights leaders and school superintendents has the preconditions of conflict."

Contrary to the professional maxim that they should not engage in politics, superintendents are political actors with political powers. As in other units of government, school district governance involves conflict. For many superintendents, political conflict presents a crucial paradox: when conflict occurs, the technical skills so diligently developed are not only useless, they are a liability. Trained in the tenets of an ideology that defines conflict as pathological and consensus as the most legitimate basis for decisions, superintendents may find conflict more painful than other executive officers. A defensive, hostile response to criticism may then generate more intense conflict. Thus, superintendents with doctoral degrees (the most ideologically committed) and little on-the-job experience (which mitigates the lack of bargaining skills resulting from a highly technical education) may be less skillful in managing conflict (Crain, Boss, Zeigler, Tucker, Wilson). An earlier study (Boss, et al.), showed that those with doctorates were less successful in managing conflict than those without. Our pilot study verifies those findings. It also reveals that as city managers are less educated, they appear, as a group, to be more tolerant of conflict than do superintendents.

Episodic, nonroutinized conflict presents a particularly acute problem to superintendents. It reduces the effectiveness of their basic resources: expertise and authority. Superintendents do not perceive their expertise to be negotiable. Because they rely on technical knowledge rather than traditional political skills, their power base is destroyed when knowledge becomes inapplicable. It is no surprise that they are troubled by episodic conflict over issues that cannot be solved by

technical skills, such as busing and school closures made necessary by declining enrollments. As American schools move from an era of expanding to one of limited resources, the essentially political issue of resource distribution will become dominant. School boards will continue to turn to superintendents for recommendations. Superintendents must use both their political and technical resources as the task of conflict management becomes more prominent in school district governance.

Intraorganizational conflict, even though Bailey would classify most of it as subordinate, frequently involves bargaining among experts. Here, conflict management assumes the characteristics that normally concern students of organizations: the issues are likely to be only loosely anchored to strongly held ideological preferences and beliefs and the expertise of bargainers is acknowledged and respected (see Gross, et al.). Management strategies for this type of conflict are described as rational and, according to Blake and Mouton, encompass the following steps: (1) defining the problem, (2) reviewing the problem, (3) developing a range of alternatives, (4) debating alternatives, (5) reaching for solutions, (6) explaining and evaluating the solutions, (7) weighing alternate solutions, and (8) selecting the appropriate solution.

Broader social and political conflict is rarely managed by using such a process. Under conditions of expanded conflict, or rancorous conflict in Gamson's terminology, the conflicting individuals or groups are likely to attach strongly held ideologies to their goals and to be unwilling to acknowledge the legitimacy of expertise. Political leaders, whose resources are electoral, achieve success by symbol manipulation, especially

by the introduction of symbols denoting an enemy: Goerge Wallace versus "pointy-headed intellectuals," Richard Nixon versus "bums," Jimmy Carter versus "greedy oil companies."

Conflict detection is an integral part of conflict management. Cobb and Elder refer to this as anticipation. By anticipating that a passive conflict may become active, it is possible to regulate its expansion. If this is done, managers maintain some control of the agenda, some control over the participants, and hence, some influence over the resolution. If anticipation does not occur, management becomes more reactive and utilizes the tools of reactive conflict management. Preeminent among these are discrediting the goals, leadership, or motives of an antagonistic group, coopting group leaders into an institutional web, frequently by the creation of committees, and providing symbolic reassurance by the same device. A less overtly political strategy is to contain conflict by individualizing it. Managers, more than elected officials, have recourse to this method. Our own research and that of Eisinger and of Katz, Gutek, Kahn, and Barton have shown that citizen-manager contact tends to concern the redress of individual grievances. School managers, we know, spend more time resolving individual complaints than answering requests or demands for policy decisions. The degree to which such complaints can be resolved without resort to policy modification will be an important predictor of the extent to which conflict can be contained. If individual requests are treated responsively, collective action is less likely.

Our conceptualization of conflict, then, includes the following:

1. Conflict has been managed when the parties to the dispute abandon or at least suspend active blocking behavior. The management of conflict is the conversion of conflict from an active to a passive state.

2. Successful management institutionalizes conflict.

3. Management of intraorganizational conflict involves a different set of activities than does the management of broader social and political conflict. In intraorganizational conflict, the issues are not likely to have a strong ideological component and the expertise of the parties is accepted. In expanded public conflicts, the parties are likely to attach strongly held ideologies to their goals and to be unwilling to acknowledge the legitimacy of expertise. Symbol manipulation, for example, is more appropriate for handling these conflicts than for intraorganizational conflicts.

4. Social conflict is not managed by avoidance; on the contrary, avoidance leads to expansion and wider public participation and, consequently, to a more complex management problem.

5. The management behavior associated with the public conflicts we are interested in is directed toward controlling the expansion of conflict.

Superintendents and City Managers

Our study seeks the answers to several questions. Do school superintendents and city managers differ in their conflict management behavior? If so, what organizational, personal, and environmental variables might explain the difference? If there are personality variables, are they conditioned by professional socialization? If there are structural differences, are they amenable to modification?

Historically, and in our pilot study, superintendents are more concerned with intraorganizational (or superodinate/subordinate) conflict than are managers. Skills useful in resolving such conflicts are not necessarily helpful in resolving lateral conflict, a task to which managers seem well attuned. Lateral conflict will, however, become more prevalent in school governance, and skills of a less technical nature required.

A comparison between superintendents and planners is apt for making this point. Planning staffs, like superintendents, attempt to avoid political entanglements. In an effort to reduce the dominance of technicians, planning staffs are gradually being reorganized to make them more directly accountable to elected officials. The goal is to temper their professionalism with political sensitivity; to increase their sources of information. As Long explains, if the structural changes work, they will force planners to "understand the politicians' perspectives and incentives."

Superintendents in our small sample were more akin to planners than were managers. The high value they placed upon technology made them less sensitive to the range of community values as expressed in the political process. Thus, when they were engaged in political decision making, they found conflict management more difficult than when the conflict was between professionals. This point is illustrated by our in-depth analysis of a superintendent, as well as by the broader array of responses in our survey. Thus, comparative analysis between those experienced in lateral conflict and those unaccustomed to it will aid in the conversion of destructive conflict into constructive conflict. If conflict can be institu-

tionalized, made part of the normal process of educational governance, then it will cause less interruption and upheaval.

City managers and superintendents are engaged in conflict management and the supervision of the delivery of services. There are two distinct approaches to these two tasks. Political scientists believe that conflict management is what governments do. Public management specialists tend to view uncontained conflict as a hindrance to the delivery of services.

To some degree our data indicate that superintendents and city managers reflect these two viewpoints. This is not to say, given our limited data, that managers uniformly take a more "political" view of management than do superintendents. However, we do suggest that they regard conflict as more normal. They are more willing to compromise, more aware of competing demands, than are superintendents. Are they "better" conflict managers? Who can say? What does emerge from our findings is that conflict does not deflect them as much as it does superintendents. As they do not make a clear distinction between management and service delivery supervision, it is psychologically less draining for them to serve as arbitrators. In this sense, managers follow more the traditional political mode than the technological mode, so characteristic of superintendents.

An equally plausible notion about why city managers may be more effective managers of conflict than superintendents is that the structures of city government and school government are significantly different; conflict management is more common for city managers. Managers deliver diverse services and city councils and bureaucracies are less deferential than school boards and staffs. Managers have fewer buffers. Consequently, they may

receive more on-the-job training in conflict management. Superintendents, on the other hand, tend to be rather insulated by their larger central staffs. A closer interaction between the superintendent and the principals in the district, like a city manager's informal meetings with department heads, may provide the superintendent with more accurate information about existing opinions or potential reactions of local citizens regarding educational policies. In addition, establishing subdistrict constituencies, creating permanent subcommittees assigned to specific issues, or providing staff assistance to the school board may help to improve the conflict management capabilities of the superintendent.

Explanations for managers' greater ability to manage conflict are still unclear. Is it the professionalism of superintendents that makes them less willing to bargain? Possibly so, since approximately one fourth of superintendents have doctorates, while very few city managers have as much formal education. We do not find managers with a fixed agenda as often as we do superintendents. Nor do we find that managers have as broadly defined nonnegotiable areas of policy as superintendents.

Environmental conditions, such as the size of the population and the socio-economic composition of the community, may influence the ability of superintendents and city managers to effectively handle conflict. In addition, these contextual variables may influence what types of conflict management behavior are more effective. Managers in communities with diverse populations may be more effective if they adopt a cooperative style of conflict management (Minar). Conflicting demands from different constit-

uencies may be more prevalent in areas with a higher population density than in more sparsely populated areas (Lineberry and Sharkansky).

The service delivery characteristics of the community may also affect the ability of superintendents or city managers to minimize unnecessary conflict. Our preliminary findings indicate that the effectiveness of the conflict management behavior of city managers and superintendents seems to be positively related to service delivery characteristics, such as the number of police per reported crime or teacher/student ratios and average daily attendance rates. The direction of causality between service delivery characteristics and conflict management behavior remains to be determined. One thought is that an ineffective conflict management style may result in a decline of the level of service provision effectiveness. Another viewpoint is that low service delivery potential will reduce the ability of city managers and superintendents to effectively manage conflict. A larger sample is needed before we can adequately analyze the threads of interaction between service delivery and effective conflict management. Given the increasing scarcity of financial resources for the provision of public services, this research issue seems to have important policy implications for future educational and municipal governance.

The differences between city managers and superintendents can be summarized as follows:

1. Professionalism. A key ingredient of professionalism is autonomy, the freedom to make decisions about one's work. Our study has shown that the stronger the sense of professionalism, the greater the need for autonomy. Lipset and Schwartz and Schumpeter also discuss the impact of education

upon the need for professional autonomy. Most city managers are administrative generalists; most superintendents are selected from within educational ranks. The educational backgrounds of city managers are diverse; the education of superintendents, more narrow and specialized. Superintendents normally possess more formal educational credentials than city managers; most have advanced degrees, almost invariably in educational administration. Studies of graduate curricula in educational administration further indicate that course work is highly specialized (AASA-ICMA, Challenges; Horizons).

Thus, we believe there is a higher sense of professional identification among superintendents than among managers and that this identification, although it may enhance intraorganizational authority, is dysfunctional in resolving community conflicts that expand to the point where expertise is no longer a valued resource. One city manager, reflecting upon his training and his job experiences, lamented, "The would-be manager is trained as a managerial generalist, uncontaminated by any talent of political craft." He went on to argue that "profession" does not describe the manager's job, "and it would be a disaster if it did." On the other hand, "making the manager a better politician is advocated, even to the extent of engaging personally in the electoral process" (Donaldson). Such opinions are not part of the ideology of superintendents.

2. Scope of public goods. Just as the educational background of superintendents is more concentrated than that of managers, so the public good they distribute is more limited. Managers are responsible for the

administration of a broad range of services; superintendents, a single service. Further, the service managed by superintendents involves a "sacred object," the child. Most of the services provided by city managers do not involve objects of such emotional attachment. Planning and budgeting for municipal services seem to involve more pragmatic than ideological bargaining. This is not to say, of course, that ideological conflict is absent. The literature on fluoridation and the widespread attention given to the treatment of homosexuals demonstrate that, indeed, it is very present. Further, even a cursory examination of urban life suggests that central city problems are becoming less technical. In this sense, the problems of city manager and superintendent are similar. The problems are becoming less amenable to technical solutions, yet the recruitment of managers and superintendents still favors the technical problem-solvers (Stillman)--"Managers as a class are better at assembling and interpreting technical data, analyzing the logic of a problem, and applying rules to particular cases than they are at sensing the complications of a human situation" (Banfield and Wilson).

3. Role as policy initiator. City managers, like superintendents, are now expected to initiate policy. Both were initially regarded as neutral experts, a clearly untenable role. Both are now viewed as having broader responsibilities. Our research leaves no doubt about the role of the superintendent. Research on city managers (Loveridge, Eyestone) reaches similar conclusions for managers. However, important differences are present. City councils represent a more diverse range of religious, educational, and financial backgrounds than do school boards (Eulau and

Prewitt; Torgovnik). Deference to expertise is more characteristic of middle to upper class professionals than of less affluent social classes. Thus, the city manager's role in policy formation is more likely to be challenged by the city council than is the superintendent's by the board, especially when the council is led by an active, popularly elected mayor. Kammerer observed that city managers have less range of discretion under these circumstances (Kammerer). A direct comparison can be made with one of the cities in an earlier study (Tucker and Zeigler) in which the mayor became, by reason of his office, chairman of the school board. In this case, superintendent discretion was limited.

4. Alliances and interest groups. Partially because of their more general and substantive managerial responsibilities, city managers face the problem of alliances between department leaders and organized interest groups. Thus, managers might find themselves in conflict with these alliances. This phenomenon is less often found in school governance, although superintendents must, of necessity, rely on staff for information. The governance structure does not encourage administrative-interest group alliances independent of the superintendent. However, superintendent relations with school principals create problems not felt by city managers. Whereas muncipal departments develop strong relations with functional interest groups, principals may develop independent influence based upon geographical identification. Securing the loyalty of principals and allowing them the latitude to modify policy can be a valuable strategy for superintendents. The fact that such buffer opportunities are not as available for city managers may create more direct group interaction and conflict

with politically influential elites (Carlson; AASA-ICMA, Challenges; Horizons).

We caution that the small sample included in our pilot study prevents reliable generalizations. The study utilized structured interviews, mailed questionnaires, and secondary data sources that provided information on demographic, organizational, and service delivery characteristics. These data were analyzed through bivariate and multivariate techniques in order to examine the relationships between conflict management and other variables. The data are not included in this paper because we will be presenting more recent findings from a broader sample in our final report.

The in-depth analysis (case study) and anecdotal information provided to supplement this pilot study, while interesting, still leave one puzzling about how to unravel it all. As Simeon noted, "Case studies have a tendency not to focus upon the 'normal' but upon the unique, exotic, or important, so insights gained from them may actually be misleading." While our findings are inconclusive, they do illustrate types of conflict management behavior encountered in the pilot study. They indicate that the professional training of superintendents may contribute to a more homogeneous set of expectations, to less tolerance of ambiguity, and to a less process-oriented management style than is true for city managers.

In-Depth Analyses

Conflict Management Behavior of a City Manager and Superintendent

Introduction

Our pilot study efforts included pre-testing various modes of data collection. In addition to developing reliable sets of interview questions, we conducted two in-depth analyses to see what additional information might be gained beyond that from sources previously described. While these examinations tended to confirm our findings from the larger sample of the pilot study, they also served to give examples of how a city manager and a superintendent manage conflictual issues. If generalization from a small sample is difficult, it is impossible to extract reliable generalizations from two in-depth analyses. However, it is important to understand why these two were selected. In examining the range of interviews, we selected those which most typified the differences between superintendents and managers. Viewed another way, these analyses exemplify the management style of each group as revealed in our larger survey.

In-Depth Analysis of a Superintendent

In October, 1979 the staff began preparing an analysis of conflict in one district. Weekly trips to the district included interviews with administrators, school board members, active interest leaders, and members of the media. The interviews ranged in length from one half hour to three hours. The study involved a total of eleven trips and 17 discussion-interviews. Available documents, such as administrative reports,

board minutes, reports of interest groups, and the like, were collected and examined.

The conflict we focused upon began with a plan for busing to accomplish desegregation, but it was clear from the beginning that the issue involved a more fundamental problem: the authority of the superintendent. The district is predominantly white, but its black population is heavily concentrated in one section of town. Ninety-four percent of the district's 8,100 black students reside in the same attendance area. At the beginning of our analysis, the superintendent indicated that a major cause of conflict was uncertainty about legitimate decision-making authority. He had not anticipated this conflict because he believed that he had, after a long period, developed a good understanding with the board, an understanding that both he and the board regarded as workable. While he indicated that desegregation was a major problem, and that the board could possibly become seriously divided, he believed the conflict could be contained.

The immediate problem was to develop a desegregation plan that would satisfy federal guidelines. The initial plan was drawn up by the superintendent and his staff and agreed to by the existing board (two members, elected in April, 1979 indicated reservations but did not voice strenuous objections). As was the custom in the district, such a plan was viewed by the superintendent as the responsibility of the central office staff. The superintendent had developed a highly competent, professional staff, one in which he took considerable pride. The feeling of mutual trust was returned. The superintendent was viewed by his staff, and, indeed, by his colleagues within the state and nation, as an effective administrator.

The superintendent's goal was to avoid court-ordered busing by developing a voluntary plan. He expected that a voluntary plan would satisfy the dominant white community while at least forestalling a threat of litigation by what. at the beginning of our analysis, was a poorly organized and poorly led black community.

The superintendent's basic plan was therefore one that had been developed through intensive professional communication, but that involved little communication with board members or the black community. At the time the plan was being developed, the superintendent expressed fears that he would find it difficult to work with a board that was "not sufficiently supportive." He referred to two newly elected members who viewed the relationship between the board and the superintendent in a manner incompatible with those of the board majority and of the superintendent himself. These members, who later played a significant role in the escalation of conflict, had indicated that it was the responsibility of the board, not the superintendent, to develop a busing plan. They spoke mostly about the issue at hand, but indicated a broad based concern that the board had become a "rubber stamp." At this point, however, the majority of the board did not propose to develop an alternate plan or to discuss the appropriate division of responsibility between the board and the superintendent.

The superintendent's plan was completed and presented to the board for future consideration. In the meantime, however, a significant change in board membership occurred. Two members retired. In anticipation of

possible conflict with the black community over voluntary busing, the board appointed a prominent black academician to fill one of the vacanies. This appointee had not previously been associated with any nascent black response to busing and was viewed by the board as a possible link, trusted by both sides, who could assure smooth sailing for the superintendent's plan. The other appointee had been prominent in social welfare activities and had on occasion criticized the superintendent's failure to coordinate his plans with citizen groups. Concurrently, the city council had passed a resolution calling for more coordination between the city and the schools. These new members, therefore, did not begin their service with the assumption that the superintendent's plan was necessarily the most desirable one. (NOTE: In the interest of brevity, the details of the plan, and the alternatives which were subsequently developed, will not be discussed. Rather, only points of major contention will be reported.)

The superintendent's fear of losing board support was well justified. By November 1979 the two new members not only indicated that the superintendent's plan was unacceptable, they also began meeting with black leaders to develop an alternative plan. These meetings were highly significant. First, the contact was made by board members, not by the superintendent. Second, as the board and the black leaders began to work together, a sense of unity and purpose developed. The Black United Front was organized, and served as a semi-official liaison to the board members developing an alternative plan. In terms of conflict management, the superintendent perceived himself to be moving into a difficult position; the growth of organized interest groups portended a potentially unmanageable conflict. He was

finding that the dispute could not be individualized, a basic strategy of conflict management.

In November, the board introduced an alternative plan developed by the board's "desegregation committee," which differed markedly from that of the superintendent. The willingness of the board to consider this alternative was, irrespective of the differences between the two plans, a direct confrontation with the superintendent. The board member most responsible for developing the plan made it clear that he intended to challenge the policy making authority of the superintendent; the superintendent was certainly aware of the intent. Therefore, the presentation of an alternative plan became the focal point of a conflict between the board and black community, on the one hand, and the superintendent on the other. The superintendent was supported by his professional staff and the teachers and principals involved not only in the schools targeted for busing, but in schools throughout the district.

The conflict was becoming defined in the classic terms of "professionals versus the public." The specific differences in the plans reflected well the underlying and emerging philosophical conflict. The superintendent's plan called for more busing of black students into white schools than the reverse. The desegregation committee's plan called for an equal proportion of busing to occur. While the exact proportions to be bused were certainly negotiable, the desegregation committee and the Black United Front argued, publicly and vehemently, that the excessive busing of black students indicated the superintendent's "insensitivity" and "unresponsiveness" to the community. The superintendent argued, privately and without public

discussion, that his plan would have the least impact upon professional staff and, thus, the least disruptive effect. He was clearly assessing the probability of staff conflict as opposed to community conflict. His decision represented not only his professional judgment about the best plan for busing, but also his estimation of probable conflict situations that would result from either decision. His calculation, which proved inaccurate, was that staff conflict would be more sustained and more difficult to manage than would board-community conflict. This conclusion was based upon the fact that he had become accustomed to a supportive board and enjoyed the confidence of the city's business and professional elite.

The "professionals versus the public" component of the conflict was intensified by the desegregation committee's proposal that principals and teachers in the affected schools be interviewd, screened, and possibly selected, by a committee of parents from the attendance area. The superintendent, fully supported by the central office and teachers, viewed this proposal as nonnegotiable. (Superintendents typically view personnel issues as a professional responsibility.) He did not seriously consider the possibility of parental involvement in staff selection, despite some modest precedent in other districts. Again, he responded primarily to the professional staff, which was strenuously opposed to parental influence in the selection of school personnel.

By December the lines of conflict had been publicly drawn. The two newly appointed board members, allied with the two most recently elected members, opposed the superintendent's plan. The chairman of the board

emerged as a swing vote. He was ambivalent, not so much about the merits of the two competing plans, as about the possible consequences of rejecting a proposal so vigorously supported by the professional staff of the district. The four members supporting the plan of the desegregation committee met regularly with the Black United Front and arranged for prominent civil rights leaders to address meetings of the Front, lending legitimacy to their efforts. In January a one day boycott by all black students was supported by the Front and was about 98 percent successful. The superintendent was admittedly surprised over the success of the boycott, but was now so firmly committed to the defense of his position that to modify his stance would make him appear, in his words, to be "bowing to groups which are destructive of public education."

The four members of the board who were working with the Front concluded that the issue could only be resolved by firing the superintendent. They indicated that in numerous meetings with the superintendent there was no evidence he would entertain any suggestion of compromise. In their view the superintendent was inviting a challenge to his authority, which, if he won, would insure the acceptance of his desegregation program.

Whereas the four members were united in their support of the desegregation committee's plan, they were not united about firing the superintendent, a division the superintendent anticipated. Intense discussions among the four members revealed that three votes to fire the superintendent were certain, but one was not. This undecided member enjoyed the distinction of being the subject of an editorial in the daily newspaper urging her to disassociate herself from any vote to fire the superintendent.

As the evaluations of the superintendent's performance proceeded, the issue was not confined to desegregation. Rather, the discussions focused upon the inability of the superintendent to adjust his behavior and become responsive to a board that was anxious to assert itself in policy formation. The superintendent enjoyed the fierce loyalty of the professional staff and was supported by the business community (as evidenced by the aforementioned editorial). However, the superintendent mentioned on several occasions that he feared the business community was losing its influence. His fears proved justified. A meeting was scheduled with the intention of calling for a vote on the retention of the superintendent. The chairman of the board, within a few hours of this meeting, called a news conference announcing his support for the superintendent, hoping to influence the vote of the reluctant member of the coalition. However, the vote to fire the superintendent, taken in April, was 4-3.

An interim superintendent was appointed and the discussion of the desegregation plan resumed. The superintendent's plan was no longer an issue. Rather, the problem was one of working out the details of the desegregation committee's plan. Members of this committee indicated that, had the previous superintendent revealed any willingness to compromise, he probably would have retained his job. It was not the plan, but his style which led to his removal. The lessons were not lost on the interim superintendent. He promptly indicated an interest in meeting with the Front; he also implied a willingness to discuss the question of parental participation in staff selection. However, his comments generated substantial fear on the part of teachers and administrators. Thus, the interim

superintendent became as reluctant as his predecessor to agree to what was regarded as a reduction of professional authority.

The dismissal of the superintendent has prompted leaders of the business community to begin a recall drive against the four members who voted to fire the superintendent. The recall effort, enjoying extraordinary financial support, has employed professional campaign managers. The Black United Front, in response, has begun a recall petition against the three members who voted to retain the superintendent.

There is still no desegregation plan. Several school board members have been meeting with the mayor and members of the city council to generate community support for the plan when it is finally approved. These board members, alarmed by the extent of the business community's opposition to the firing of the superintendent, fear they might be equally determined to oppose the desegregation plan. The mayor's support is regarded as crucial, since the business community financed and supported his election. The mayor, however, is not willing to make a personal commitment.

It is probable that if the plan is not adopted and supported, court-ordered busing will occur. As the desegregation committee's plan is essentially voluntary, it is hoped that mandated busing can be avoided; however, active elite support is required. It is this very elite that was alienated by the decision to remove the superintendent. The business community is uneasy about an active board working in cooperation with an organized minority interest group. As one would expect, black city council members are enthusiastic, as are those traditionally identified with liberal causes and lay participation. However, the fears of the business community,

reflected in the mayor's refusal to lend his prestige to the effort, are joined by a growing uneasiness among teachers and other professionals. The issue is no longer that of parental participation in personnel selection (an issue almost certain to produce a stong negative response), rather it is the fear that policy is no longer in the hands of professionals.

The dilemma is well expressed by the hopes and frustrations of the two recall groups. The initial effort, to recall those who voted to fire the superintendent, was justified on the grounds that these members had been too responsive to "special interest groups" and had failed to honor the division of responsibility between board and superintendent. The second effort, to recall those who had voted to retain the superintendent, was justified on the grounds that the superintendent and his supporters on the board had been "resistant to the Black United Front" and would not recognize it as a "legitimate" representative of the black community.

Thus, the conflict expanded both in scope and in terms of participants. Initially a minor conflict within the professional staff, it later encompassed previously inactive interest groups and a previously quiescent board.

Those supporting the "professional" point of view believe the quality of education has been irreparably damaged. They believe teacher morale has declined, especially in the face of some apparent willingness to negotiate on the question of personnel selection. A majority of principals within the district are applying for positions elsewhere, as are many central office personnel. It remains to be seen, of course, whether or not such movement occurs, and whether it extends to the teaching staff (whose options

are more constrained). Also, yet to be ascertained is the extent to which an expanded and continuous conflict will speed an already declining enrollment. The issue, the attendant conflict, and the ultimate resolution are far from settled.

In-Depth Analysis of a City Manager

The in-depth analysis reported here involves a city of relative social homogeneity. It has a population of 100,000. The city manager associates major problems with the extraordinary growth of the city's population. It has doubled in size in the last decade. As the manager arrived about ten years ago, he is psychologically and emotionally attuned to the costs, benefits, and regulation of growth. Most of the conflicts he identifies, as well as most of the priorities on his agenda, are linked to a burgeoning population.

Specifically, he lists the following as the most serious problems requiring his attention: (1) disagreement with county-wide planning agencies about appropriate planning goals (he emphasized that these disagreements are philosophical, not technical), (2) the need for a more stable tax base to meet increasing demands for city services (he is personally committed to a city income tax), (3) the necessity for more control of individual behavior than is traditional in relatively small western cities (due to the expanded population), and (4) the desirability of projecting an image consistent with the progressivism characteristic of the city (the specific example selected by the manager was a gay rights ordinance).

The manager's approach to these problems, his style, was consciously non-professional. Although he displayed for our staff a list of his policy priorities, and had distributed this document to the city council and mayor, the language of the document was tentative, non-technical, and inquisitive. It was in the tone of "how about this" rather than in the technological mode associated more closely with superintendents. When asked, he spoke at some length about his association with schools of public policy and departments of management, political science, and economics. He was proud of his academic associations, and not defensive about the fact that, like most managers, he did not have an advanced degree. When asked about his areas of expertise, he raised and rejected a variety of topics and finally concluded, "Possibly finance, but really not much more than general management." When probed about his meaning of general management, he was emphatic in disassociating himself from scientific management, rational planning, or any currently popular textbook approach to conflict management. He pointed with pride to the fact that his office had never spent a dollar on consultants (except technical consultants such as those dealing with water pollution).

His close contacts with the academic community, his distrust of professional consultants, and his conscious emphasis upon a "seat of the pants" presentation of himself led us naturally to enquire about the kinds of information he needed and his sources of such information. On this point, he made a clear distinction between technical information and political information. Unlike his counterpart in the superintendent's office, the manager had virtually no central office staff. There was an assistant city manager

and some clerical help. Thus, he relied upon other components of the city government for technical information. He dealt with the planning department or the police department on a basis of equality. Nominally, the manager was the organizational superior. In fact, he chose not to interpret his position as one of superiority. His interaction with such departments was unscheduled; no regular staff meetings were held and information was usually exchanged over lunch.

Unlike the superintendent, the manager sought information of an explicitly nontechnical nature. He indicated that political information and technical information were equally important. For political information, he relied almost exclusively upon the city council. The manner of the interaction was revealed in the way he developed his year-long agenda. This document was prepared in close collaboration with the council and the various department heads. Several items relatively high on the manager's list never made it to the agenda because he was persuaded that they were politically unfeasible.

The manager's approach to the council was low key, as was his approach to various departments within the city bureaucracy. Although the council is elected and he serves at their pleasure (without, incidentally, a contract) he does not regard manager-council relations as a problem. Unlike the superintendent, the manager is not overly concerned with delineation of authority. That is, in his experience the distribution of authority does not usually generate conflict. Turf issues are conspicuously absent. The reason for this is related to his management style and to the electoral structure of the council. Unlike school boards, council members are

elected from wards. Whereas superintendents believe ward elections hinder councils from taking a community-wide view of policy, the manager regards the ward base as essential to an understanding of the distribution of opinions within the community. He relies upon the council to provide him with political information. Conceptually, he views the city as a combination of diverse neighborhoods with competing needs.

When discussing the council, he linked conflict not to an inherent tension between technology and democracy, but rather to the fact that, as he put it, "their conflicts reflect their constituencies." This he regarded as an advantage, in that "conflict is routine." The manager illustrated a major point of our study. To him (and we, of course can only report that he was typical of the city managers in our pilot study), conflict management was routine because it emerged from "the flow of events." Superintendents occasionally lament that conflict management deflects them from tasks associated with rational management, i.e., with the delivery of services. The manager was emphatic in stressing that there is no such distinction. The job of managing a city is the job of managing conflict. There can be no deflection. His political style meant that he was relatively unconcerned about nonnegotiable areas of policy. In our in-depth interviews with superintendents, the notion of nonegotiable policies occurred frequently. It was the disagreement over a nonnegotiable area (professional versus lay authority) that led the superintendent of the preceding analysis into a serious dispute and, ultimately, into a virtually uncontrollable conflict. The manager could think of no nonnegotiable areas. He would prefer, given the best of all possible worlds, that

personnel decisions be within his exclusive domain. He pointed out, however, that this was not the case and that he had rescinded several personnel decisions. The example he gave was especially instructive. The city council, with strong support from feminist organizations, approved an affirmative action personnel policy that actually exceeded federal requirements. The manager was opposed, but, as he said, he "counted the votes and forgot it."

We believe this flexibility to be an especially crucial aspect of his management style. Our experience with superintendents has attuned us to the notion of acceptable and unacceptable losses. Superintendents generally assert that if they lose more than five percent of their policy proposals they have incurred a vote of no confidence. On this subject, the manager commented, "If I lose before the council, so what? I probably lose between 10 and 20 percent of the time, and sometimes I lose before I begin. It never even gets to a vote because I learn from various council members that there is no support. If you add in these defeats, I actually don't win nearly as often as does the superintendent. I can't afford to link my ego to policy because I couldn't stand the stress. A loss is a loss; I live with them, and sometimes it turns out to be O.K."

We found, however, that his sanguine view of policy defeat created problems with some departments, especially the planning department, which felt he was too reluctant to assert the technical superiority of his information. Members of the planning staff were, on occasion, openly contemptuous of his approach. When asked about his problem, the manager was frank. He said that "planners view the world as though current problems

are minor in competition with future goals. I view the world as more complex." Planners sought, unsuccessfully, to undermine manager-council relations by building alliances with council members more sympathetic to their goals. They were not often successful because the manager beat them to the council. It is not that the manager opposes the goals of the planners; rather he balances their goals against neighborhood aspirations.

The management style of the city manager can be seen in the resolution of the conflict associated with his agenda, to which we now turn.

Planning goals. As noted above, the manager was, as he put it, "cursed" with "zealots" from the planning staff who wanted to implement comprehensive land use planning to a degree comparable to that of a city many times larger than theirs. Although the manager was hardly an opponent, he was the object of well organized anti-planning campaigns and could not lend his full support to those who advocated comprehensive planning. The opponents were led by a politically popular county commissioner. This commissioner had been elected with strong financial support from the building and real estate lobby. Although the commissioner was not an organizational superior of the manager, he was a political equal. Initially, the commissioner had no allies. In the year prior to our study, however, he was joined on the commission by another commissioner with similar values and campaign support. Both of these commissioners indicated that they were "at war" with the planners. When asked about their relations with the city manager, they revealed that they were as well informed about him as he was about them. They described him as "basically a planning enthu-

siast but also a realist." They concluded the interview by saying, "We can deal with him."

The manager's views of these commissioners was less tolerant. Privately, he confided that he regarded them as "idiots," and implied that they were so beholden to the development and real estate lobby as to make them "whores." (One was subsequently convicted of using his public office to benefit his partners in a real estate firm.) While holding them in contempt, the manager nevertheless met with them regularly to try to negotiate a compromise plan that could gain the approval of the city council and the county commission.

This dispute will not be described in detail in this report. Instead, the main parameters of the competing positions will be presented, and the solution negotiated by the manager explained. The city council had, in the manager's view, a "liberal" majority. This majority accepted the views of the city planning staff without serious challenge. The philosophy of the staff was as follows: growth should be concentrated in the central city and severely constrained in the outlying areas. Population density should be encouraged by multifamily dwellings, smaller lot size, and other devices to insure that the central city would be densely populated and "urban sprawl" avoided. The county had no argument about urban density; but the commissioners objected strongly to the "discrimination" against development beyond the city limits. As one city council member explained: "The county commissioners want to turn our city into a San Jose; we want to keep it like Davis."

The two positions attracted a high level of community support. Developers were allied with the county; various coalitions of environmental groups were allied with the city. The manager emerged as the negotiator. He was generally afraid that the result of the conflict would be a loss of the city's commitment to planned growth, a concept he strongly supported. His compromise was ultimately accepted. Essentially, he proposed a modification of the urban density solution. He recalled that a city council member had told him that her neighborhood regarded the urban density model as one that would "create a bucket of shit surrounded by a green pasture." This language made a deep impression upon him. It was a crudely phrased lay opinion; however, the manager believed there was some truth in the argument. He persuaded the city planning staff to modify the urban density solution (specifically by prohibition of "pan-handling" or building two houses on a single lot without access to both from the street). In exchange, he convinced the county commission that any reduction of building lot size in rural areas would be economically risky. Thus a plan was adopted. Who won? The manager believed he did because planning was not defeated, only wounded. He was proud of his bargaining skills, more concerned with the process than with the solution. He also noted, with considerable irony, that his stature with the planning staff had improved.

Financial issues. The city manager also described a dispute over taxes that focused upon his contention that an income tax would be required to maintain an acceptable level of services and keep the credit rating of the city high. Major public funding of an arts complex had been approved by the voters, and the manager believed that the time was right to reduce

reliance upon the property tax. He regarded the property tax as more regressive than the income tax, even though corporations were heavily assessed. He personally prepared a proposal for an income tax to be considered by the city council. His technical advice came from university-based economists. Within a month, he had arranged meetings with major interest groups (principally from the business community) and had received assurances that they would support the tax if the council voted to place it on the ballot (fiscal measures require voter approval in his state). His next task was to secure council approval. However, he did not anticipate a serious problem; the liberal majority, his allies on the planning issue, abandoned him. He met with them personally, and then arranged for more moderate council members to meet with them, but the results were not encouraging. After a weekend spent in trying to figure out whether the city really had to have a tax, he decided to abandon his efforts. In the next financial election, which did not contain an income tax proposal, voters approved a city budget generally in keeping with the level of services as recommended by the manager.

Law enforcement issues. The city manager also described his involvement in two issues related to law enforcement. First, according to the police department, there was an increasing problem of violence in the downtown area. The matter was not high on the personal agenda of the manager, but was brought to his attention by the chief of police. The downtown area merchants had complained that because of the unsavory reputation of the area, an increasing amount of business was being lost to shopping centers. The problem was viewed by the police department as largely one of "teenage

vandalism." The downtown mall was a center for drug traffic and attendant violence was escalating. The police department proposed that the city prohibit the carrying of knives or other sharp objects. The manager was initially opposed to the idea because he envisioned substantial enforcement problems. However, since the suggestion was made by the police department, he assumed that they were aware of difficulties in implementation. Thus, the manager agreed to work with the department in preparing an ordinance for the consideration of the council. His first job was to secure the support of the American Civil Liberties Union, traditionally opposed to potential infringement upon civil rights. The ACLU was regarded by the manager as a crucial support group, given the liberal majority on the council. The police department was not really on friendly terms with the ACLU but the manager was, since he and the ACLU president had attended several university sponsored workshops together over the past year. The ACLU reacted favorably. Although some constraint of individual freedom was involved, the ACLU did not really regard the freedom to inflict bodily harm as an issue of the same magnitude as the traditional defense of freedom of speech and assembly. Sportsmen's groups, such as the local members of the National Rifle Association, found little reason to identify with, as they phrased it, "vagrants with switchblades." Local merchants wanted the ordinance prohibiting the carrying of knives passed as soon as possible. The manager then discussed the matter with the liberal majority, including in his discussion the position of the ACLU. Assured of support, he turned his attention to technical details, came to the council with a proposal and secured unanimous endorsement.

The final issue described by the city manager involved requests for his support in securing a gay rights ordinance. This bothered the manager considerably. He was not especially opposed to gay rights, but he feared a conservative backlash. As mentioned, he had already angered some feminist groups. At the time the gay rights issue began to surface (at the initiation of the liberal majority in the council in coalition with various gay rights organizations and the ACLU), the manager was engaged in drafting some more rigorous anti-prostitution ordinances. Again, feminists were concerned. He did not want to anger both feminists and gays simultaneously. The merchants and the police were most anxious for strong anti-prostitution ordinances. The feminists began to meet with the gay rights groups concerning both issues. The manager feared this coalition. He made a choice. He would work with the police and merchants on the prostitution issue. To make the implementation palatable to feminists, the manager suggested, and the police agreed, that "johns" (customers) be prosecuted along with prostitutes and that the names of the "johns" be published in local papers. The equal application of the law satisfied the feminists. Having committed himself on this issue, the manager decided that the risk of involvement in the gay rights ordinance was too great. He decided to remain neutral. On this matter, the superintendent of schools took an active role in support of a gay rights ordinance. Although the council passed the ordinance, a conservative backlash led to a well organized and successful campaign for its repeal. The superintendent was thus associated with the unsuccessful gay rights ordinance, but the manager was not.

As of this writing, the council has just completed an evaluation of the manager. Although the report is confidential and not available to the public, it does specifically mention the city manager's "flexibility." The document was approved unanimously. The essence is that, while the city may be short handed in the acquisition of technical information, it is well managed. The recommendation is that the manager's staff be enlarged to improve its information gathering potential.

Interpretation of the In-Depth Analyses

The superintendent dealt with a single conflict, or related conflicts engaging the same participants. The manager dealt with a variety of unrelated conflicts. The superintendent relied upon professional advice and was not able to cope with political information, or bargain with hostile groups. Thus his behavior escalated the conflict. He could have avoided the expansion of conflict at a number of points in its development, but that would have involved a sacrifice of professional values. Thus, he lost control of events. The manager placed less emphasis upon technical information, and more value upon political feasibility. Sometimes he "won" and sometimes he "lost," but events were never beyond his control. The manager seemed to experience less tension between professional values and political necessity.

These differences can be sharpened by a recapitulation of the relevant research questions addressed previously in the analysis of larger samples.

1. Conflict management behavior. Although both superintendent and city manager are described in these in-depth analyses in terms of their roles in specific conflicts, the city manager did in fact spend more time managing conflict than did the superintendent. The superintendent was, obviously, engulfed and destroyed by conflict, in part because of his reluctance to treat conflict as normal. Like most superintendents in our sample, he was buffered by a staff and less able to anticipate conflict. His consistent inability to gauge the seriousness and scope of the conflict can be attributed to his insularity. He did not use the board to gather political intelligence and was on several occasions unable to anticipate conflict. His failure to interact informally with the board stands in sharp contrast to the practices of the city manager.

2. Conflict orientation. The superintendent relied heavily on deference to his expertise as a resource in conflict resolution. Preferring, as do most superintendents, a rational strategy for resolving disputes, he was regularly frustrated when such deference was not forthcoming. The city manager, more accustomed to conflict, entertained few illusions about rational problem solving and deference to expertise.

3. Conflict management style. The city manager was clearly more effective in resolving conflict than was the superintendent. In terms of our coding of effectiveness, the manager was classified as most effective and the superintendent as least effective. The manager anticipated, regulated or controlled conflict and minimized hard feelings between affected parties. To a considerable extent, he was able to do so because he did not follow a rigid set of professional requirements; he felt less

threatened by compromise. The degree to which managers deliver a variety of services provides on-the-job training and certainly contributes to their effectiveness. The manager under analysis here was quite forthcoming about his "seat of the pants" approach and his lack of commitment to professional norms. Accordingly, he clearly employed a cooperative style of conflict management. In contrast, the superintendent's style was characterized by avoidance or competition. Ironically, the superintendent's behavior contradicted the rational, step-by-step approach to conflict that he favored. He did not follow a rational path because he was too committed to professional ideals. The manager, who professed no knowledge of standard "how to do it" theories, in practice resolved conflict more rationally.

4. Public involvement. The manager accepted group participation as part of the decision making process and communicated with interest groups prior to proposing a policy. The superintendent regarded interest groups as a threat to his professional autonomy and would not traffic with them. He was emphatic in his insistence that his professional integrity would be compromised by regular interaction with organized groups. To the extent that groups did come to the attention of the superintendent, they did so through a buffering central office staff. The manager, lacking such a staff, negotiated directly with groups. Thus, the manager accepted groups as a legitimate part of the policy process while the superintendent did not.

5. Professional status. On the various levels of professional commitment, such as the Hall professionalism scale, the manager and the

superintendent differed dramatically. The superintendent was far more professionally committed, in terms of education, professional activity, and attitude. It was our hypothesis that this professionalism negatively affected conflict management behavior. The hypothesis is supported by the in-depth analysis as well as the larger sample. The more professionally committed administrators become, the less able they are to manage conflict, especially lateral conflict. The amount of conflict the superintendent and the city manager initially experienced was not markedly different. However, the inability of the superintendent to manage lateral conflict was in clear contrast to the success of the city manager.

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